

Seth Freeman, Resident of West Hartford, 4Cs SEIU 1973

Testimony to Higher Education Appropriations Hearing 2/15/23

Good Evening, Senator Osten, Representative Walker and members of the Appropriations Committee.

My name is Seth Freeman. I live in West Hartford and I am the current President of Congress of CT Community Colleges (4Cs) a SEIU local that represents approximately 3,800 faculty and staff across our community colleges, and 400 part-time faculty in the University of Hartford. I'm also a proud member of Recovery For All—a statewide coalition of community, faith, and labor organizations across Connecticut.

I am testifying today to urge you to increase the block grant to the CSCU system to improve educational services for our students and address long-standing inequities in our CSCU workforce.

Community college faculty, staff and students are asking for a budget that is equitable.

Our community colleges serve a wide range of students from across our state. We serve traditional college-aged students seeking a highly affordable and cost-effective means of obtaining a college degree, who are seeking transfer to public and private universities upon completion. We serve non-traditional students such as adult-learners returning to pursue a college degree after years in the workforce, who see the need for a college degree to get ahead in their jobs. We serve students coming from under-resourced and marginalized communities who are often underprepared for some of the rigors of higher education, and need additional remediation and resources to help them catch up and meet the rigors of a college degree.

The vast diversity of our students we serve – diversity in their backgrounds, goals and abilities - is what truly makes our community colleges so special.

We can not fulfill our mission in our community colleges, if we lack the resources to serve our diverse student bodies across the state, including addressing and meeting the challenges our students bring to our campuses. When we don't fulfill our mission, we have fewer graduates advancing to our transfer institutions, fewer graduates entering the workforce with additional skills, and fewer graduates leaving with increased abilities to both improve their individual lives and build and strengthen our state as a whole.

Unfortunately, Governor Lamont's budget does not provide the necessary investment into our CSCU system, to enable us to fulfill our mission and best serve our students around the state.

We need our state to invest in our public institutions of higher education to make our community colleges and universities the engines of access and opportunity they are meant to be.

We also need our state to increase investments into our community colleges to address inequities in our workforce that directly hurt our students.

Today, our community college system in CT relies on a majority part-time workforce to teach and serve our students across the state. Today, nearly 75% of our teaching faculty are part-time. We rely on a majority part-time workforce with full knowledge and understanding that this model is not best for our students. Rather, we rely on this model because it is cheaper to do so.

A year ago Manchester Community College Professor Pat Sullivan described the overreliance on part-time workers, and disparities in access to full-time faculty across CT public higher education in his article:

Racialized austerity and CSCU's 'Students First'

<https://ctmirror.org/2022/03/17/racialized-austerity-and-cscus-students-first/>

Professor Sullivan's article builds on existing research in the CUNY and SUNY systems that find disparities between the full-time faculty to student ratios, based on the percentage of student population of color. The research findings are simple and stark – **college campuses with larger Black and Brown student populations have lower rates of full-time faculty.**

Professor Sullivan applies this lens to our public higher education system in CT, and finds racialized austerity in our public higher education system. Professor Sullivan shares:

“What we see from UConn, ECSU and MCC is that as our Hispanic/Latino and Black student population increases from 16% to 22% to 41%, the utilization of part-time, non-tenure track faculty similarly increases from 33% to 59% to 78%.”

Professor Sullivan also includes a quote from Education Scholars [Adrianna Kezar and Daniel Maxey](#) on why this is important:

“Non-tenure-track faculty, particularly part-time faculty members, face a number of challenges and obstacles in the workplace that constrain their abilities to provide a high quality educational experience and facilitate optimal student learning. Recent research suggests the rising numbers of part-time faculty, their working conditions, and the lack of support they receive from their institutions are having an adverse impact on various measures of student success. Examples include diminished graduation and retention rates, decreased likelihood of transfer from two- to four-year institutions, lower grade point averages, and greater difficulty with major selection and persistence; these outcomes were often disproportionately experienced by students who were beginning their postsecondary education, including those in developmental or remedial courses.”

Community college students deserve the same access to full-time workers as our state universities and UConn.

Our overreliance on part-time workers is unfair to our students, and unfair to our faculty and staff. Part-time faculty and staff are systematically denied full participation in our academic community. They are unable to participate on college and statewide committees. They are unable to advise students, participate in campus events, support student clubs, go on student trips. They are unable to fully share their knowledge and experience with our students outside of the classroom. Our students are shortchanged from all of this. Our existing full-time workers are also shortchanged, because fewer full-time faculty and staff are available to perform these duties, meaning more work falls on the shoulders of fewer full-time workers.

Now is the time to finally address this **long-standing and well known inequity** in our CSCU workforce. We need to increase the CSCU block grant to **hire full-time permanent workers** in our colleges and provide **pathways to full-time work** for those seeking it.

Additionally, we need to address the significant problem of lack of health-care benefits for workers in the CSCU system. We need to increase the CSCU block grant to **provide health care benefits** to part-time workers. Currently, state employees must work half time or more in order to receive health care benefits. In the system's own words, in their 2018 white paper [Access & Opportunity](#) “Over the years, as resources have grown tighter, our institutions have replaced departing full-time faculty with adjunct faculty as a less expensive alternative” (p.31). . This is an exploitative practice that has left some faculty forced to cobble together a full-time living out of teaching part-time, with no access to health care benefits at any of their jobs. Our CSCU workforce is being hurt, which ultimately ends up hurting our students and the communities we serve.

CSCU students deserve a higher education budget that prioritizes equity for students.

We fully support efforts by Governor Lamont and the legislature to **expand the PACT program** in the short term to serve more students across our state and continue making our colleges more accessible. In the long term we support FREE (not just debt free) community college.

Along with supporting PACT expansion, we categorically **oppose raising tuition** on our students. We have many students who don't qualify for PACT, have used up their financial aid, or who are not eligible for all forms of financial aid due to various factors. Raising tuition directly hurts these students. Raising tuition is bad public policy. Tuition hikes hurt our students, hurt enrollment, and hurt our state. No student should have to balance paying tuition against paying rent or food. Nor should students have to take on additional hours at work to pay for rising costs of tuition. These are the real difficulties our students will face if tuition is increased.

We need to increase the CSCU block grant, so we can expand PACT, and keep tuition flat for all CSCU students.

Thank you to Chairs and all members of the Appropriations Committee for your hard work. Thank you for this opportunity to testify, and thank you for all you are doing to help make our state the best it can be for all of our residents.